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LETTER DATED 14 NOVEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 13 November 1996 addressed to you by Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq, concerning imaginary incidents that the United States claims to have occurred while its aircraft were violating Iraqi airspace and on the dangers posed to peace and security in the region by the maintenance of the no-flight zones in Iraq.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nizar HAMDOON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Letter dated 13 November 1996 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General

1. On 2 November 1996 a White House spokesman claimed that radar installations at an air defence battery in southern Iraq had tracked a United States aircraft violating Iraqi airspace and that the aircraft, an F-16, had fired at the Iraqi radar. He said that he did not know how many missiles had been fired or whether the aircraft had hit its target.

2. On 4 November the United States Department of Defense announced that a United States aircraft, also violating Iraqi airspace in the south, had fired a HARM missile at the radar system of an air defence battery on the grounds that it had been tracking the aircraft.

The claims made by the United States are completely groundless, and there were no incidents of any kind in the skies of southern Iraq on the two days indicated. On 3 and 4 November an official spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq refuted these mendacious and fabricated allegations, which had been made as part of the election advertising campaign in the notorious and discredited American manner. In order to show you that this is so, I should like to state as follows:

1. On 4 November United States Secretary of Defense William J. Perry announced that his Department had begun an investigation of the two incidents and of whether Iraqi air defence radar had actually been tracking the aircraft in question.

2. On 5 November the spokesman for the United States Department of Defense announced that Department experts were studying the information in their possession concerning the incidents of 2 and 4 November and that the investigation would take several days. He stated that Washington had not monitored any unusual activity in the area in recent weeks.

3. In its issue for 5 November The New York Times reported that Pentagon officials had acknowledged that the two pilots who had claimed that Iraqi radar had tracked them appeared to have been mistaken. The newspaper quoted sources as saying that an investigation was under way into the mistake made by the pilot in the first incident and that the decision of the pilot in the second incident also appeared to have been mistaken. Pentagon officials told the newspaper that the two incidents were due to a malfunction of cockpit equipment in the aircraft.

It will be clear to you from all of the foregoing that the fate of Iraq's security and its interests depend on mistakes committed by American pilots and malfunctions of automatic equipment in United States aircraft, as was the case in these two successive incidents.

While it remains committed to its decision, taken in response to the proposal of the governments of a number of friendly countries, notably the Russian Federation and France, to give political action a chance to remedy the situation with respect to the unlawful no-flight zones in northern and southern Iraq, the Government of Iraq has sought to inform you of the facts of the matter so that the international community may be aware of the dangers posed by the continued maintenance of the no-flight zones to security and peace in the region.

(Signed) Mohammed Said AL-SAHAF
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Iraq